

# Random Encounters

## Weaving a Web of Evil

By Dale Donovan



### The Organization

A nest of the bizarre, six-armed, spellcasting spell weavers exists in the warren of catacombs, sewers, crypts, or dungeons beneath one of the campaign's big cities. From this headquarters, the band of spell weavers gathers magic items from the city's residents above. These items may belong to resident families as treasured heirlooms, they could be passing through the city in the possession of a merchant or trader in magic wares, or the items could be hanging from the hips, slung over shoulders, tucked up sleeves, or secreted about the persons of wandering adventurers. In any case, the spell weavers have created a scheme to divest those cherished magic items from their current owners. No one knows exactly why the spell weaver species is so intent on gathering magic items, because none of the race has ever been witnessed using a magic item of any type other than the unique chromatic disk (a 6-inch diameter disk that glows and whose color slowly rotates through the visible spectrum) each spell weaver carries.

The spell weavers came to the city within the last few months. They secured their underground lair, driving out the flock of grell that had lived there. They then began to establish their "business" of magic item collection. The spell weavers do not seem capable of mundane speech, but their telepathic abilities are not limited to just their own species. They instruct their followers via telepathy, directly translating the ideas without the need for language.

The spell weavers initially used their *charm* spells to gain a few thieves who would turn to them for their "fencing" needs and who would also spread the word of their service. (Not all items picked up by thieves can be sold for currency in the area they were stolen from, and a lot of times magic items in particular are hard for thieves to either use or sell. As a result, they often use fences with connections in other areas to get money for goods.) Since the spell weavers have enough funding and "some connections in other cities," they can easily step into the role that others still hold. To maintain the relationships they have set up and to gain more thieves (known as "agents") willing to use them as fences, the spell weavers initially offered very good prices as well. (Problem agents were disposed of quickly and in a manner that didn't lead back to the spell weavers where possible.) Unfortunately, not only have the spell weavers taken custom from existing fences (making them rather angry), but they've also encouraged further thefts of specific items. In some cases, the owners of the items had paid their "protection" money, so these agents have essentially become freelancers in the eyes of the local guilds. (While this makes it easier to make any agents who turn away from them "vanish" and place the blame elsewhere, it also means that the spell weavers are continually needing new thieves and rogues to work with them.) To protect themselves from retribution from other fences, the spell weavers work well away from their home, disguise themselves, and take great care to prevent anyone from learning where they currently live.

In terms of how the spell weavers work, they watch the area themselves for magic items. Once a likely target has been identified, they make it known to any agents that are in their good graces, and these agents attempt to gain possession of the item or items in question as they would normally. Some of the more common tactics used are sneaking into owner's room or rooms during the night (or sneaking into the stable to pilfer the items directly from the wagons in the case of a caravan), bribing or incapacitating anyone guarding the items, causing a distraction that allows the thieves access to the items without the owners nearby, drugging or poisoning the items' owner, either to allow easier theft or to barter the antidote for the items, and the more direct means of simply using the Pick Pocket skill on the person carrying the item or taking the items by force. The agents are instructed only to reserve potential or confirmed (via *detect magic* spells if the thief is a spellcaster) magic items for the spell weavers: the rest of the ill-gotten booty is handled per the guild's normal rules for such acquisitions.

Once the agents have the items, they stash them in one of several prepared drop points below the city's surface where other minions of the spell weavers (a few charmed grell, to offer the illusion that the floating aberrations still control the underground area now inhabited by enigmatic spellcasters) lurk. The spell weavers sometimes reward their agents by placing goods that can be sold into the normal market (in other words, items that aren't personally identifiable) at these same drop points. Such compensation commonly consists of items that were suspected to be magical but are only mundane; these items are often quite valuable, but because they are not magical, the spell weavers have no interest in them.



Once the items are in the spell weavers' possession, they are categorized using the *identify* spell. Some items of lesser power are then sent to another town to other spell weavers for true fencing purposes in return for money from the other spell weavers. This income allows the spell weavers to gain supplies such as material components for their spells and cash for the occasional bribe (when the spell weavers don't want to risk a failed *charm* attempt or when an agent needs the coin to convince someone to look the other way).

The rest of the items disappear into the spell weavers' lair. The spellcasters may be magically transporting the items elsewhere (via their *plane shift* ability) for purposes unknown or it may have something to do with the spell weavers' chromatic disks. These unique items recharge themselves each night; sages speculate they may achieve this by somehow draining the magic of other items and drawing that energy into themselves. The spell weavers then use the chromatic disks to give them extra spells each day.

### **Bringing the Parts Together**

Although random encounters usually happen by chance, some DMs may wish to tie these four parts together into something that could lead to further adventures. Part 3 of this series introduces some ways to tie all of these together, though you'll see some shorter methods in parts 2 and 4! For now, though, DMs may want to think about what towns in his or her campaign can have groups of spell weavers working in them so that a greater "web" is in place. The spell weavers introduced in these random encounters can act as one of the specific sets with which the PCs may need to deal (or to whom the PCs find themselves falling victim!).

### **Coming in Part 2 of Weaving a Web of Evil**

In the second part, learn about the masters of this operation and their servants.

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